

7/23/2007 This Week in Congress

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July 23, 2007

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." This week, the House passed legislation that funds education, rural health and other domestic programs. I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Dillons and Kwik Shop to Join to Reopen Grocery Store in Greensburg

On Friday morning, I visited with Dave Dillon, chief executive officer of the Kroger Company, about the possibility of Dillons returning to Greensburg. Later that day, it was announced that Dillons and Kwik Shop - both of which are owned by Kroger - will reopen a grocery store. Kwik Shop, which has already reopened its convenience store, will expand the facility to include a Dillons grocery store in the next two to three months. The store will offer a selection of fresh meat, produce, frozen food and household items at prices found at other Dillons stores.

A grocery store is a cornerstone for any rural community. Since the tornado, I have been in communication with Dillons officials on several occasions, encouraging them to rebuild. I appreciate the decision of Dillons and Kwik Shop to continue their presence in Greensburg. This is news that Greensburg residents were hoping to hear and is an important

step for rebuilding the community.

House Agriculture Committee Approves 2007 Farm Bill

The House Agriculture Committee passed the 2007 Farm Bill by voice vote on Thursday. After three days of amendments and debate, the committee finally agreed upon a product that fell short in some respects. I support, however, many of the concepts in the bill that maintain conservation, nutrition and renewable energy initiatives and keep in place some form of a safety net for Kansas farmers and ranchers.

During the committee meeting, I pushed for needed reforms by offering an amendment to make the counter-cyclical program more trade-compliant, fiscally responsible and effective in delivering a safety net. While this amendment was not adopted, the Committee did include the option for producers to choose between the current priced-based counter cyclical program and a revenue-based counter cyclical program.

I was successful in adding two other amendments. The first alters the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) to permit dryland crop production and grazing on CREP acres. Crop production or grazing on CREP acres would be limited to instances where the program is aimed at reducing ground and surface water usage through retirement of irrigation rights. This change in CREP will allow economic activity to continue in rural Kansas communities, while providing a tool to address declining water resources. The second amendment will guarantee a certain amount of food aid be devoted to programs that develop needy countries' ability to produce their own food and avoid famine. I hope this will help developing countries become less dependent on emergency aid and more self-reliant.

Two contentious issues addressed in the bill are implementation of Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) and limiting farm program payments. The COOL language adopted by the committee was a compromise that maintains the mandatory nature of COOL, while easing the record keeping burden on producers that would likely be required under current law.

The reforms to payment limits provide for direct attribution of farm program payments to the individual producer, but maintain the spouse exception found in current law. In addition, the language eliminates payments for individuals who have an adjusted gross income of more than \$1 million - lowered from \$2.5 million. There are additional limitations on individuals who have an adjusted gross income between \$500,000 and \$1 million.

The 2007 Farm Bill faces significant challenges later this week when it is scheduled to be before the House. The budget and political environment surrounding this debate have made it difficult to meet the needs of rural America. An increasingly urban Congress represents a country that has become disconnected from where food comes from. This reality is something farm state lawmakers must overcome during the upcoming debate. It is my goal to help Kansas continue providing our country with a safe, stable and secure food supply. To learn more about the provisions included in the Farm Bill approved by the House Agriculture Committee, you can visit the Committee's Web site.

Speaking to the Tomorrow's Agribusiness Leaders

On Tuesday, I had the opportunity to address the Tomorrow's Agribusiness Leaders Class of 2007, which consists of members of the Kansas Grain and Feed Association and Kansas Agribusiness Retailers. I enjoyed the opportunity to meet with these individuals who are the current and future leaders of the Kansas agriculture industry. The group was in town at an important time for agriculture in Kansas and across the country. I appreciated their questions and the enlightened discussion of the 2007 Farm Bill. This year's class includes: Lori Deyoe of Ulysses, Norman Hancock of Belvue, James Jirak of Wichita, Erik Lange of Walton, Jeff Lavery of Kansas City, Jim Lee of St. Paul, Brandon Schlake of Topeka, Fred Seiler of Moundridge and Andy Zwegardt of Copeland.

Visiting the Topeka Veterans Affairs Health Revenue Center

En route to the airport on Monday, I toured the Veterans Affairs (VA) Health Revenue Center in Topeka. The Revenue Center is responsible for responding to telephone calls from veterans across the country who have questions about billing and health benefits eligibility. During the visit I sat in on an incoming call from a veteran and I was impressed with the quality of work performed by the Centers' 350 employees to help care for our nation's veterans. In recent years I have encouraged the VA to expand the Revenue Center's operations and provide resources to hire additional staff. I am pleased that they are now in the process of hiring an additional 90 employees and will soon be responsible for handling calls for the entire country. Special thanks to Doug Kinsinger, President and CEO of the Topeka Chamber of Commerce, for helping arrange my visit. Many thanks also to Mary Walker with the Revenue Center for giving me the tour and to Christy Caldwell with the Topeka Chamber of Commerce for joining me.

Enjoying High Plains Band Camp Finale Concert

After joining sponsors and faculty last weekend at an event to kick-off the 60th annual High Plains Band Camp at Fort Hays State University (FHSU), I returned Saturday to attend the finale concert at the Beach Schmidt Performing Arts Center. The concert featured students from across our state who spent the week learning and improving their music skills. I was impressed by the talent of these young musicians. Thanks to Camp Director Kay Werth and all of the instructors for sharing their time and knowledge.

In the Office

Tim Rogers of Salina was in with the Salina Airport Authority to provide me with an update on various projects currently underway at the airport. Larry Pitman of Topeka was in with the Kansas Foundation on Medical Care to discuss health care quality improvement in hospitals, nursing homes and health care clinics. Gary Du of Overland Park and Linda Wang of Lenexa were in to talk about China's persecution of Falun Gong practitioners.

Bill Greiving of Prairie View was in with the National Sorghum Producers to visit about the 2007 Farm Bill. Greg Krissek of Wichita and Jere White of Garnett were in representing the National Ethanol Vehicle Coalition to advocate for building more of the infrastructure needed to support the use of ethanol. James Ryan of Overland Park was in with the International Code Council to talk about ways to help communities enforce building codes. Gina Bowman-Morrill with Coffeyville Resources was in to update me on the cleanup and recovery efforts from the flood in southeast Kansas and to let me know that refinery operations are expected to resume in September.

Stan Stark of Haviland was in with Farmers Cooperative Company to discuss the progress of the farm bill. A group of Kansans were in with Christians United for Israel to advocate for policies that support Israel. The group included Darcy and Pamela Kells of Satanta, John and Pat Powers of Topeka, Mary Robinson of Galena and Sharon Cannon of Baxter Springs. Members of the Kansas Association of Corn Growers were in to discuss the status of the 2007 Farm Bill. In with the group were Jere White, Charles Foltz and Brandi Grosdidier of Garnett; Armin Nelson of McPherson; Bob Timmons of Fredonia; Greg Stone of Garden City; Ken McCauley of White Cloud and Brian Baalman of Malo.

Allie Devine of Topeka was in with the Kansas Livestock Association to talk about livestock issues related to the 2007 Farm Bill. Members of US AgBank were in to discuss credit provisions in the 2007 Farm Bill. In with the group were David Janish and Alan Jaax of Wichita, Larry Kepley of Ulysses, Mick Gechter of Garden City, Larry Barrett of Colby, Joe Schoonover of Byers, Gerald Gerstner of Frankfort, Mark Wulfkuhle of Berryton, Janet McPherson of Manhattan, Craig Gebhard of Long Island, Ron Rahjes of Kensington, Ron Bach of Jetmore, Alan Hoffman of Hoisington, Lyle Gray of Leon and Bob Wietharn of Clay Center.

Mike Koss of Haddam, who interned in my office this spring, was in this week to visit about his participation in the U.S. Congress/Korean National Assembly Youth Exchange Program. Bob Page, President and CEO of the University of Kansas Hospital, was in along with Kari Bruffett of Kansas City to discuss the importance of a Medicaid drug discount program and stopping Medicare physician cuts. Congratulations to the hospital on being recognized for having one of the best cardiac programs in the country.

Many Kansans stopped by my Washington, D.C., office this week for a tour of the United States Capitol building, including Patrick and Meghan Hayes of Wichita, Mick and Lori Gechter of Scott City, Kenneth and Debra Lebbin of Ellinwood and Jon and Carrie Starns of Brewster. In from Hays were Tim, Ann, Alexander and Samuel Crowley and also Dave, Sheila, Sierra and Derek Eichman. Kelly, Beth, Tegan and Anna Nusser of Lyons also came by for a tour, as did Bob, Jane and Sarah Krug of Garden City and Mark, Jeana and Matthew Eckhart of Lincoln. In from Ellsworth were Shelby Sneath and Mike, Susan and Shannon Keith. Also in were Doug, Penny, Maggie and Zane Hilbig of Lakin and Paula Alexander of Ulysses.

Very truly yours,

Jerry